

**Homily Outline for the Easter Vigil  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
April 8, 2023**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

- I. What do you think is the most repeated command in the Bible?
  - A. Perhaps some of the following come to mind:
    - Do not lie
    - Do not steal
    - Love your enemies
    - Do not murder
    - Do not commit adultery
    - Do unto others as you'd have them do to you
    - Love your neighbor as yourself
  - B. Actually the most frequent command in the Bible is, "Be not afraid."
    1. It appears twice in the passage we just heard from the Gospel of St. Matthew.
    2. First from the angel, then from Jesus Himself, after rising from the dead.
      - a. An angel appears to the women who saw the stone rolled back and the tomb empty where Jesus had been buried and says to them, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said."
      - b. The women "went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples."
      - c. Then "Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."
      - d. Notice the line saying that the women "went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed."
    3. Apparently, the angel's command not to be afraid did not completely dissipate their fears, but they were not paralyzed by their fears, as they ran with joy to tell the disciples the astonishing news.

- II. Among the greatest fears that people have is the fear of death.
  - A. Our contemporary culture does not deal well with death.
  - B. Many people hide from the reality: instead of funerals and cemeteries, we now have “celebrations of life” and “memorial gardens.”
  - C. Is it possible to think about the reality of death and not be afraid?
- III. St. Mark’s Gospel tells us that when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, which we call His agony in the garden, Our Lord “began to be filled with fear and distress” (Mark 14:34).
  - A. Jesus was not immune to fear.
  - B. But having gone through His excruciating agony, suffering, betrayal by Judas, denial by Peter, abandonment by all of His disciples except John, scourging at the pillar, being nailed to the cross, and dying like a common criminal, Jesus appears victorious over suffering and death to tell us not to be afraid, because we too will be victorious over suffering and death, thanks to God’s grace.
- IV. This is a message of great hope!
  - A. Once in a funeral homily in my homily I talked about the hope we have as Christians, that thanks to Our Lord’s resurrection, we too have the hope of eternal life.
    - 1. Afterwards, the son of the deceased told me he had more than hope: he was sure that his mother would be in heaven.
    - 2. I explained that the virtue of hope is more than wishful thinking.
    - 3. Our Christian hope in eternal life is not like common expressions we often hear, such as, “I hope it won’t rain tomorrow” or “I hope I get a raise soon.”
  - B. For Christians, hope is a firm conviction, a theological virtue, which means that it is rooted in faith.
    - 1. In the *Letter to the Hebrews*, hope is described there as “an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil” (Hebrews 6:19).

2. That is why the symbol for the virtue of hope is an anchor, because it is sure and firm.

V. The resurrection of Jesus fills us with hope our new life!

- A. The resurrection of Jesus is the central event of the Christian faith.
- B. Contrary to what many think, resurrection is not the same thing as belief in the immortality of the soul.
- C. Resurrection is not a restoration of one's former life; it is not a resuscitation.
- D. Resurrection is God's gift of a radically new form of life.

VI. Perhaps more than anyone, it was our Blessed Mother who brought hope to the disciples in those hours after Jesus' death until His resurrection.

- A. It is Our Lady who will bring hope back to us as well.
- B. In the words of St. John Damascene, "Our Lady is rest for those who work, consolation for those who weep, medicine for the sick, harbor for those assailed by storms, pardon for sinners, sweet relief for the sad, comfort for those who implore."<sup>1</sup>

VII. In the end, the message for us this Easter Vigil is that the resurrection of Christ is more than simply a one-day celebration. It is an invitation to make the message of hope and the truth of Easter a way of life, each in our own way, striving to build up courage where there is fear, to bring light where there is darkness, joy where there is sadness, and hope where there is despair.

VIII. May God give us this grace. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> St. John Damascene, *Homily on the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary*.